



War Crimes Case Against Myanmar Junta Brought in the Philippines

Press release for publication on 25 October 2023

Manila, 25 October, 2023: The Myanmar junta has been formally accused at the Department of Justice in Manila of murdering civilians, mutilating bodies, burning down hundreds of houses, destroying churches and using aid as a weapon of war. In an unprecedented move, five victims from Myanmar's Chin State have filed a criminal complaint under a landmark Philippine law, requesting Filipino prosecutors to open a war crimes investigation into ten members of the Myanmar Junta, including top coup leader, Min Aung Hlaing.

The complaint comes on the second anniversary of the mass arson attack on the town of Thantlang, which was part of an offensive in Chin State in north western Myanmar in 2021 that saw some 2,000 homes destroyed, at least 250 people killed and 60,000 driven into India.

"The atrocity crimes being committed in Chin State are part of Myanmar's forgotten war against the Chin," said Salai Ling, one of the complainants, who is also Deputy Executive Director of [the Chin Human Rights Organisation](#), CHRO. "We are a Christian people whose Pastors are being murdered and whose churches and faith-based schools are being destroyed in a systematic campaign by junta forces. With this persecution of Myanmar's Christians continuing, we pray that our brothers and sisters in the Philippines will hear our cry and grant us justice."

The complainants include the daughter of Pu Ral Tu, who was shot and killed by the Burmese army on 29 September 2021 along with his friend, Pu Hram Cung. The two men were murdered as they went to Thantlang, which was under attack by the Burmese army, to bring medicines for civilians, who like them, had fled the fighting. Her name was withheld for security, but she told journalists "I am dreaming of accountability for the brutal murder of my father and Pu Hram Cung. They were Baptist Church Elders, good men who served their communities with pride and paid the ultimate price. Their sacrifice must never be forgotten."

Another complainant, also speaking on condition of anonymity, is the uncle of Pastor Cung Biak Hum aged thirty, who was killed on 18 September 2021, when soldiers opened fire on him while attempting to put out fires started by the Burmese army. Once killed, his body was mutilated. The complainant said "I will not accept that my nephew's death was in vain. He died attempting to save fellow citizens from the raging fires. I beseech the authorities here in the Philippines to grant us the justice we pray for."

Their Filipino lawyers, Romel Bagares and Gilbert Andres, have co-authored an [expert legal opinion](#) making the case for a trial in the Philippines under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

The two lawyers said the Philippines' International Humanitarian Law Act was "a landmark piece of legislation obligating Philippine authorities to prosecute war crimes committed elsewhere on the planet, once formally brought to their attention."

"The law builds on a long humanitarian legal tradition in the Philippines," said Andres. "It doesn't matter that the crimes were committed by non-Filipinos against non-Filipinos outside Philippine territory."

Bagares urged the courts to take action. "We respectfully request the authorities in Manila to open an investigation into these horrendous crimes in Chin State. There is a plethora of evidence gathered by the [UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism](#), IIMM, therefore much of the initial work has been done. We have also [petitioned](#) ASEAN to promote regional justice mechanisms and this case in the Philippines sends a powerful signal to our regional partners."

Chris Gunness, Director of the [Myanmar Accountability Project](#), MAP, which has supported the case said "it's time for East Asia to embrace universal jurisdiction and contribute to the development of customary international law. It is also time to shift the conversation from humanitarian aid towards accountability. The junta's denial of aid to areas devastated by Cyclone Mocha in May is criminal. But the people of Myanmar don't want to be subjected to the indignities of aid dependency. They want their full political rights and that includes accountability for the crimes committed by Myanmar's bestial junta."

For interview requests with the complainants, please contact Salai Ling on +91880818672.

Gilbert Andres is on +63 9177140007.

Romel Bagares is on +639171530738.

Chris Gunness is on +447587698990.

Journalists are invited to film the filing of the complaint – arrival shots and soundbites -- at 0900 on Wednesday 25th October 2023:

The Department of Justice
1000 Padre Faura Street,
Paco, City of Manila.

We will hold a press conference at 11 am - 1 pm at:

The Maximo Conference Room

Max's Restaurant
1123 Ma. Orosa Street cor. United Nations Avenue
Ermita, City of Manila.

You can find videos which are free to use at the following links:

29 October 2021, burning in Thantlang, Chin State, Myanmar
<https://www.chinhumanrights.org/thantlang-under-attacks/>

26 November 2021, burning in Thantlang, Chin State, Myanmar
Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) YouTube Channel
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdIY28-OoyU>

Please use the following photos with the photo credit, "Photo by CHRO".



Fires raged across Thantlang Town due to the heavy artillery strikes in 2021 on civilian houses by soldiers of the Myanmar military.



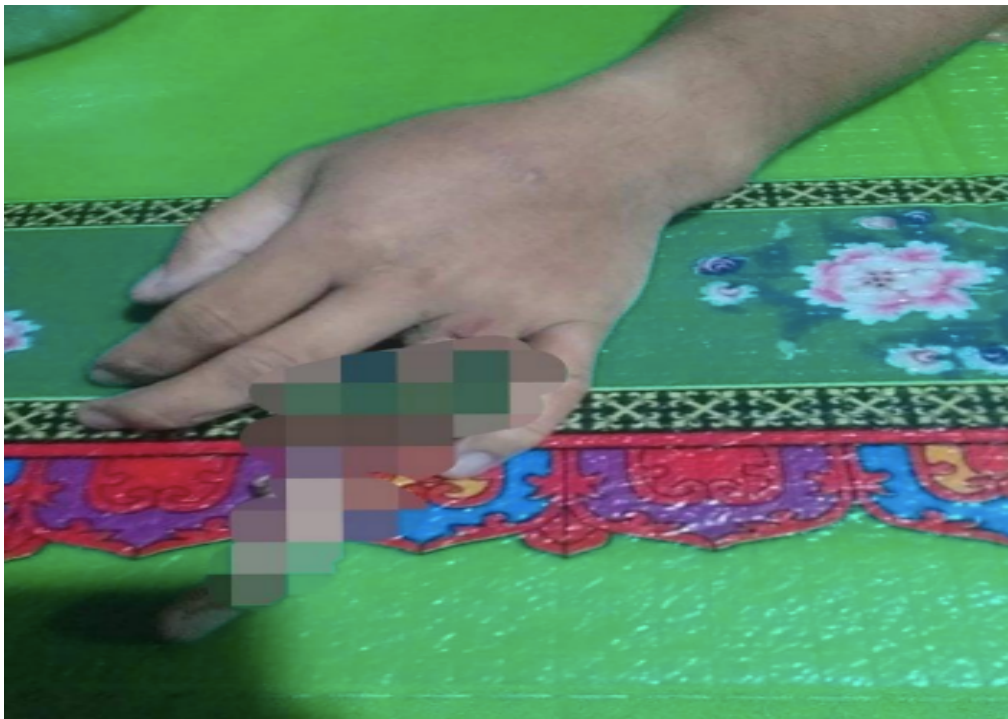
What remains of the Thantlang Baptist Church, after it was burned down on 9 June 2022 by the Myanmar military.



Pastor Cung Biak Hum (30), who was shot and killed on 18 September 2021 by soldiers of the 222 Light Infantry Division, in Thantlang, Chin State, Myanmar.



Pastor Cung Biak Hum, 30, was found dead on the roadside near his fallen motorcycle with blood streaming from his body.



The ring finger of Pastor Cung Biak Hum, 30, was cut off and his wedding ring was stolen by soldiers of the Myanmar military.



Elder Pu Ral Tu, 78, war crime victim who was shot and killed on 29 September 2021 by soldiers of the 222 Light Infantry Division in Thantlang, Chin State, Myanmar.



The remains of Elder Pu Hram Cung.



Pu Hram Chung, 59, war who was shot and killed on 29 September 2021 by the soldiers of the 222 Light Infantry Division in Thantlang, Chin State, Myanmar.
